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ABSTRACT

Personal interviews were conducted with persons involved in the hiring process in 60 companies throughout Ohio to determine what qualities they seek when they hire young, inexperienced workers at beginning skilled or semiskilled levels. Companies, selected to represent all sections of the state, varied in size. The study found the following: (1) there was a strong desire on the part of employers to hire job applicants who have some job skills and a positive work attitude; (2) the basics are important only to the extent and in the form required to perform on the job; (3) writing and speaking as well as interpersonal skills, appearance, and personal life skills were considered to be advantageous but not essential by more than half of the employers interviewed; (4) employers said the company would train in the areas of computer literacy and skills related to a specific job; and (5) computer literacy was the only quality studied for which a number of employers stated that it was not used on the job. Recommendations were made for the state and local levels to apply to the improvement of vocational education programs in order to promote a positive attitude in graduates looking for work, improve job skills training, ensure basic skills, and teach students how to apply for a job and participate in a job interview. (KC)

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QUALITIES EMPLOYERS SEEK IN EMPLOYEES

For
THE OHIO COUNCIL ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

By
Bill Stevenson/Ellen Bowers
Columbus, Ohio
1986

This report presents information on the qualities which employers consider to be important in beginning skilled or semi-skilled employees. The results presented in this report were obtained through personal interviews of selected individuals involved in the hiring process in companies throughout Ohio which hire young, inexperienced workers at the skilled or semi-skilled levels.

Table 1

TYPES OF BUSINESSES IN THE STUDY

Type Business	Number	Per cent
Administrative*	2	3
Consulting	1	2
Construction	6	10
Health & Child Care	10	17
Manufacturing	18	30
Plumbing, heating, & electrical	3	5
Service	6	10
Wholesale/retail Sales	14	23
Total	60	100

* Serves an administrative function for the rest of the company

Table 2

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

Number of Employees	Number	Per cent
2 - 10	12	20
11 - 50	14	23
51 - 100	16	27
101 - 500	13	22
501 - 1000	5	8
Total	60	100

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Table 3

GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD OF COMPANIES IN THE STUDY

Geographic Spread	Number	Per cent
Local	32	53
Regional (within state)	7	12
State	5	8
National	8	13.5
International	8	13.5
Total	60	100

Location of Companies Companies were selected to represent all sections of the state and the various population situations. Companies located in large cities (100,000 up) made up 29 (48%) of the 60 in the study. Sixteen companies (27%) are located in medium size cities (10,000 to 100,000), and 15 (25%) are in small towns (under 10,000) or rural areas.

IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYEE QUALITIES

The central question of this study is "How important are selected employee characteristics in the hiring decisions made by employers?" This question applies to job applicants for entry-level skilled or semi-skilled positions.

Qualities Studied Employee qualities or characteristics which were selected were those which the educational and training system could impact to the greatest degree. The following qualities were included in the study:

Employee Quality	Defined as:
Skills of the Job	The basic skill, knowledge, and understanding related to a specific job title. (ex. Typing for a secretary or running an arc for a welder).
Basic mathematics	Add, subtract, multiply, divide, fractions, percentages

Writing, Speaking, Reading	As needed for normal communication
Computer literacy	General understanding of computer usage, computer terminology, and computer output
People skills	Getting along with co-workers, customers, and the boss
Appearance	Appropriate to the job
Personal life skills	Managing one's personal life so it does not interfere with the job. (finances, drugs, alcohol, marital relations, etc.)
Positive work attitude	Positive attitude toward self and job.

Importance Levels

The level of importance which the employer was asked to choose for each quality allowed for four choices.

- Essential -- will not hire without the quality
- Advantageous -- to success on the job or advancement
- Company Will Train -- after the individual is hired
- Not Required -- not used on the job

RATING OF IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYEE QUALITIES

	Number of Businesses Rating			
Employee Quality	Essential	Advantageous	Company will Train	Not Used on Job
Skills of the Job	36	5	19	0
Basic Mathematics	29	23	4	4
Writing	22	34	1	3
Speaking	26	30	0	4
Reading	43	14	0	3
Computer Literacy	4	7	24	25
People Skills	25	32	3	0
Appearance	20	32	3	5
Personal Life Skills	19	36	2	3
Positive Work Attitude	40	20	0	0

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES RANKED NO. 1

Employee Qualities Ranked No. 1 Essential	No. of Businesses	Percetage
Skills of the Job	19	32
Positive Work Attitude	18	30
People Skills	6	10
Basic Mathematics	4	7
Appearance	4	7
Personal Life Skills	3	5
Speaking	3	5
Reading	2	3
Writing	1	2
Computer Literacy	0	0

Conclusions on Ratings of Employee Qualities

> These overall ratings of employee characteristics indicate a strong desire on the part of employers to hire job applicants who have some job skills and a positive work attitude.

> What we refer to as the basics - Mathematics, Writing, Speaking, and Reading are important but only to the extent and in the form required to perform on the job.

> Writing and Speaking as well as People Skills, Appearance, and Personal Life Skills were considered to be Advantageous but not essential by over half the employers interviewed.

> Employers stated that the Company Will Train in the areas of Computer Literacy and Skills related to a specific job.

> Computer Literacy was the only quality for which a number of employers (25) stated that it was not used on the job

Summary of Findings on Importance of Employee Qualities Generally the sixty employers interviewed saw the importance of the selected employer characteristics in the following ways:

Skills of the Job - Almost 2/3 essential & 1/3 company will train

Positive Work Attitude - 2/3 essential, 1/3 advantageous

Reading - Almost 3/4 essential, 1/4 advantageous

Speaking - Almost 1/2 essential , 1/2 advantageous.

People Skills - Almost 1/2 essential, 1/2 advantageous.

Mathematics - Almost 1/2 essential, over 1/3 advantageous

Writing - Over 1/3 essential, over 1/2 advantageous

Personal Life Skills - 1/3 essential, almost 2/3 advantageous

Computer Literacy - 40% company will train, 40% not used in this job title.

COMMENTS BY INTERVIEWEES IN COMPANY

Additional Training Recommended for Successful Employment

- Help students prepare work goals and personal goals
- Preparation for a job interview
- On-the-job experience
- Understanding of our economic system and how to work within it
- Positive feeling about self

- Keep on learning
- Improved work habits - attendance, on time etc.
- Reasonable expectations
- Understanding the position of the boss
- Willing to take orders

- Accept responsibility

Additional Qualities Important in Successful Employment

- Willingness (eagerness) to learn
- Take criticism
- Do not limit self
- Honesty
- Life values

- Keep busy - find something to do
- Accept discipline
- Have personal goals
- Cooperative
- Consistent in relations with people

Comments on Skills of the Job

- We are looking for people with the basic skills of the job:
  - > How machines work
  - > Mechanical aptitude
  - > Electrical systems
  - > Clerical skills
  - > Basics of health care

    and the company will train in the specifics of how we want the job done
- Some jobs require a combination of Skills of the Job
  - > Clerical/medical
- Need training in basic safety
- We train informally every day
- We will send good prospects to school for specialized training.

Comments on Positive Work Attitude

- Willing to do extra work if necessary
- Willing to work extra time
- Communicate with fellow workers and boss
- Go beyond requirement of the job
- Never say it won't work - Keep working for a solution

- Interested, motivated, enthusiastic, cooperative
- Interested in learning more
- Pride in work
- Not just a job - do a little extra
- An important asset - needed for promotion

- Our pay raises are based on positive attitude
- Plan - follow through
- We have to hire some who do not have a good attitude
- Willing to learn
- Friendly - talk openly

- See the good things in a situation
- Willing to accept the way the company does things
- Take assignment pleasantly
- Eye contact, body language, tone of voice, reflects how they feel about themselves

Observations on Comments About Employee Qualities

- Employers were most concerned about having employees with a Positive Attitude

- Company representatives have some difficulty in describing the actions which indicate a Positive Attitude

- The basics (Math, Reading, Writing, Speaking) were described in terms of what the individual needed to be able to do in order to be successful on the job.

- Employers want employees with the basic skills related to a job (typing for a secretary), but expect to train in their specific way of doing the job (format of letter).

RECOMMENDATIONS, FINDINGS, IMPLEMENTATION

The recommendations are based on personal interviews with some 60 employers located across the state of Ohio. Size of companies represented varied from very small (10 or fewer employees) to large (over 1,000 employees), and consisted of manufacturing, health, wholesale/retail sales, clerical, construction, and service occupations.

Recommendation 1: Vocational education training and other educational programs should make a major effort to create a positive attitude toward self and the job in all their students.

Finding: This study found that 40 of the 60 employers considered this characteristic as essential to employment in their company. This characteristic was named as Essential more than any other quality.

Implementing Recommendations:

1. Vocational education at the State level should identify those skills which indicate to employers that an individual has a positive attitude.

This study asked employers how an employee acted when a "positive attitude," was evident. The following list of actions came from employers.

- Willingness to work
- Will do a little extra on the job
- Do job to best of ability
- Understanding job and company goals
- On time - few absences
- Outgoing - Communicate with fellow workers and boss
- Want to learn
- Care about the job
- Interested, motivated, enthusiastic, cooperative
- On job during working hours

- Like job & like people
- Have a plan - follow through
- Help others with work
- Keep working to arrive at answer
- Make most of the day

- See good things in a situation
- Keep busy
- Willing to accept the way the company does things
- Willing to change
- Cooperative with staff

- Friendly with customers
- Do extra work - Go beyond requirements of the job
- Do it the boss's way
- Take assignments pleasantly
- Pride in work

- See the good in a situation
- Eye contact, body language, tone of voice reflect attitude

2. Vocational teachers should teach these "positive-attitude" skills to every student through practice in as realistic a setting as possible.

3. Each vocational teacher should serve as a role model by displaying a positive attitude toward the student and the job for which he/she is training.

Recommendation 2: Skills of the Job should continue to be a major part of the training program in vocational education.

Finding: Thirty-six of the 60 employers interviewed considered skills of the job to be essential for employment in the job titles being studied. More employers (19) rated Skills of the Job as the No. 1 Essential quality than any other quality.

Implementing Recommendations:

1. Vocational education at the State level should continue to study the skills needed for entry into jobs which require less than a college degree.

2. Education policy at State and Local levels should encourage and give credit for regular return to the job for updating vocational teachers in the skills of the job in their teaching area.

3. Curriculum guides, textbooks, and equipment must be reviewed often to ensure a close match between job requirements and subject matter.

4. Instructional strategies as well as alternative learning settings need to be identified and explored for more effective use of student's time and learning styles.

Recommendation 3: Vocational education programs and the rest of the education system should make every effort to work cooperatively to be sure that every student has the basic educational skills required of the job for which the student is preparing.

Finding: The skills included in this study were Basic Math (addition, subtraction, division, fractions, and percentages), Speaking, Reading, and Writing. In general, employers indicated that they expected beginning employees to have these skills to the extent and in the form that they are used on job.

Implementing Recommendations:

1. Vocational education at the State level should identify the specific math and communication skills required for each occupational area and plan ways of relating these needs to the vocational subject being studied.

2. The basic educational skills needed for the job should be taught in the context of the students job preparation studies.

3. Vocational teachers should stress the importance of basic education skills in job success and intergrate learning of these skills into their teaching.

4. Vocational teachers should assist academic teachers in the teaching of math and communication skills in the context of the student's vocational interests.

Recommendation 4: Vocational programs should do a more effective job of teaching students how to make a job application and how to conduct a job interview.

Finding: A majority of the employers interviewed stressed the importance of the job application.

Implementing Recommendations:

1. The State vocational education system should develop a film or video tape presentation on how to conduct a successful job interview.

2. Vocational teachers should devote more time to teaching vocational students how to fill out a job application and how to conduct a job interview.

3. Students should be provided with repeated training and experience in job-seeking and job-getting skills under the most realistic conditions possible.

4. Vocational educators should consider using the Department of Labor publication Merchandising Your Job Talents as one aid in helping students improve their job-getting skills.